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## The Thinking Hand: Book Review

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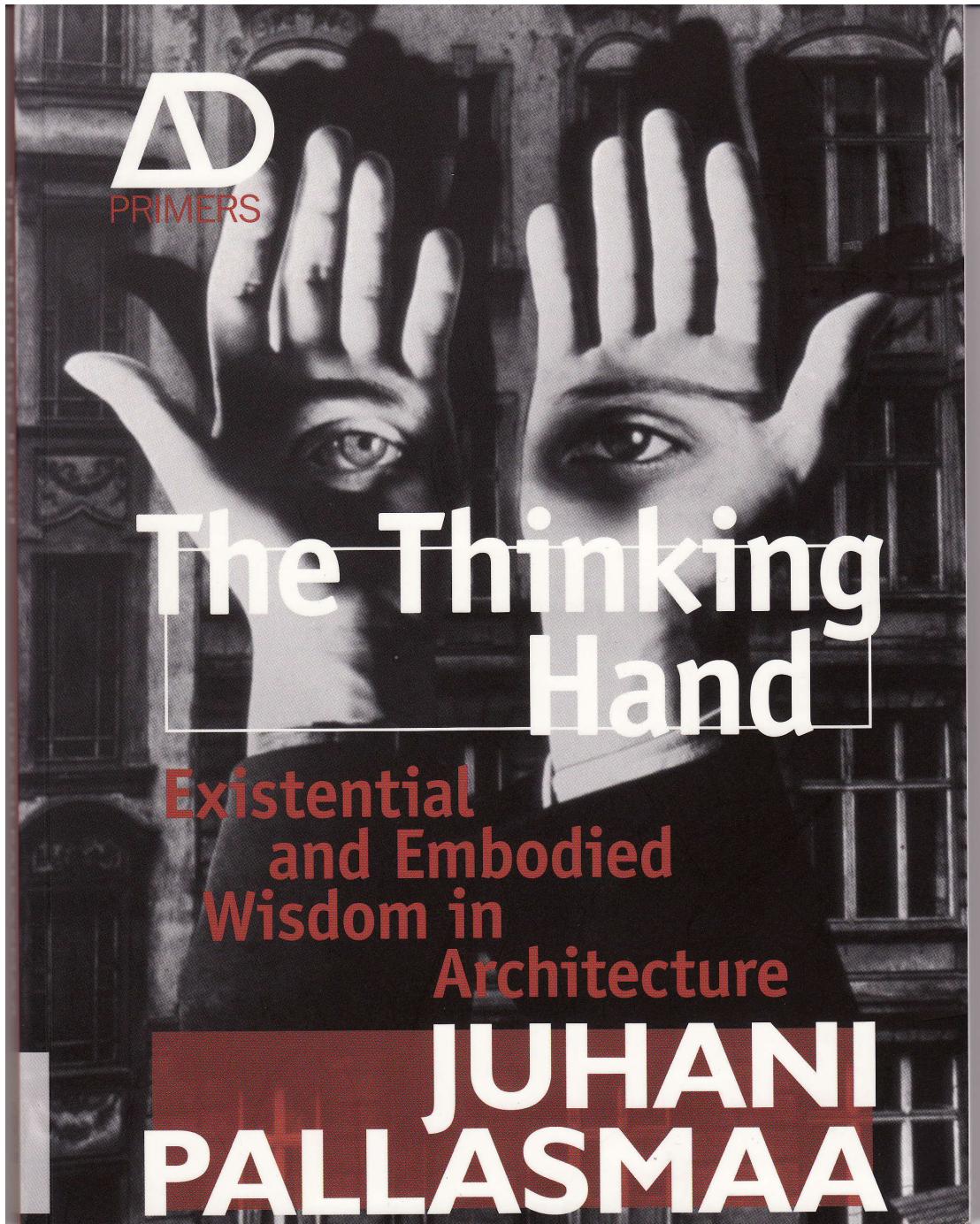


**The Thinking Hand**

Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture

Juhani Pallasmaa 2009 John Wiley & Sons. Ltd.

Review by Jim Roche



In this new book Juhani Pallasmaa continues his phenomenological exploration begun in 'The Eyes of the Skin (2005)', with the 'Thinking Hand' here proffered as a metaphor for his contention that all our senses, have innate imbedded crucial skills which help us perform the most basic daily tasks – and to create inspired works of art and architecture.

Divided into eight stand-alone short chapters, the text challenges the global fixation with the 'virtual and the visual' and the predominance of rational intellect, by exploring such themes as the connectivity of the hand/eye/brain, the extension of this fusion to tools and craftsmanship, the art of play and the tactility of hand drawing.

A chapter on 'The Drawing Hand' argues for the supremacy of hand drawing over that of the flat computer image and for the primacy of touch over visual analysis in determining the true sensuality of architectural works. He queries the false precision of the computer drawing whose essence he regards as "*the emotionless factuality of mathematicised space*" against the vagueness and deep emotion expressed by hand drawing.

The spontaneous creativity of what he terms "*the aimless play of sketching*" and the alienation of many architects from the craft of 'making' buildings is explored in two chapters with Aalto, Lewerentz, Murcutt, Piano and certain US 'Design Build' practices held up as exemplars of architects who transcend this latter weakness.

A riveting, thought provoking polemic, though certain speculations veer towards mysticism and expose the limits of the approach, e.g. the notion that muscles retain knowledge learned in activity or that the working hand possesses a "*cunning independence and capacity for autonomous thought*". Surely the brain is always in charge, albeit subconsciously?

Overall this is a 'must read', challenging thesis supported by a broad sweep of references from the disciplines of art, architecture, crafts, philosophy and literature as well as from recent developments in neurology and cognitive science, that will prompt further study for those interested in a philosophical, experiential approach to understanding architecture.